What is Poetry?

A poem may appear to mean very different things to different readers, and all of these meanings may be different from what the author thought he meant.

For instance, the author may have been writing some peculiar personal experience, which he saw quite unrelated to anything outside; yet for the reader the poem may become the expression of a general situation, as well as of some private experience of his own.

The reader's interpretation may differ from the author's and be equally valid-- it may even be better. There may be much more in a poem than the author was aware of. The different interpretations may all be partial formulations of one thing; the ambiguities may be due to the fact that the poem means more, not less, than ordinary speech can communicate.

T.S. Eliot

*Thomas Stearns Eliot (26 September 1888 – 4 January 1965) was a British, American-born essayist, publisher, playwright, literary and social critic, and "one of the twentieth century's major poets"*

What is a Poet?

A poet is somebody who feels, and who expresses his feelings through words. This may sound easy. It isn't. A lot of people think or believe or know they feel -- but that's thinking or believing or knowing; not feeling. And poetry is feeling -- not knowing or believing or thinking.

Almost anybody can learn to think or believe or know, but not a single human being can be taught to feel. Why? Because whenever you think or you believe or you know, you're a lot of other people; but the moment you feel, you're NOBODY-BUT-YOURSELF.

e.e. cummings

*Edward Estlin Cummings (October 14, 1894 – September 3, 1962), known as E. E. Cummings, with the abbreviated form of his name often written by others in lowercase letters as e e cummings (in the style of some of his poems), was an American poet, painter, essayist, author, and playwright. He is remembered as an eminent voice of 20th century English literature.*

(taken from Fire and Ice, ed. R.J. McMaster. Toronto: Longmans, 1970.)